

Project A-ko: The Visitors

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Summary: The Sequel to "The Crossing", Mike's cousin, Brian, is introduced to the group, and when trying to show off, accidentally pulls the Cyngan Spaceship into Mike's realm-- and B-ko with it! Be warned, the romance rises to a whole new level in this next inst

Project A-ko: The Visitors

Project A-ko: The Visitors (Sequel to "The Crossing")

Written By: Art Damon (A.K.A.: The Professor)

(I. The Eyes of Youth)

The bright midday sun gleamed overhead as the minivan approached. Nervous and irritable, its occupants had eagerly arrived at their destination. "All right, Brian," came the voice of a parent, "We're at Mike's house."

The twelve-year-old pressed his face to the window glass, happily catching sight of his cousin's house. "Alright!" he exclaimed, and clamored out of the vehicle, pulling his overnight bag with him. He'd been in the van for quite some time, excited to see his cousin, Michael Banks.

Brian Parker liked his cousin, largely because he was an amateur scientist. That meant that he had lots of equipment that, if he asked very nicely, Mike would let him play with. But lately, Mike had been all excited about some new machine... something that he had to promise not to tell his parents about. When they talked over the net, Mike never told Brian much, only that it was his best invention to date.

Happily jogging up to the front door, he pushed Mike's doorbell repeatedly. After a few seconds of incessant 'dinging', the door flew open and Brian waved goodbye to his parents. The waves were returned, and the Minivan pulled away, his parents off for the weekend.

Turning back to the door, the young man looked up at his older cousin. "Hey, Mike! I'm heeere!" Mike smiled down to him, "Hey, little guy!" He ruffled Brian's hair, "Ready to help me with some 'experiments'?" he said, trying to sound impressive. "You bet!" Brian anxiously responded, and charged into the house, eager to see Mike's latest innovations.

Mike sighed a knowing sigh as he watched the supercharged youngster dart about. "Ah, through the eyes of youth..." he said to himself, and shut the door. How could he explain not only the Crosser to Brian, but also the upcoming visit of A-ko and C-ko? Fictional characters, coming to visit?

'He should get along well with C-ko, though,' he thought. They both had the same thought patterns, even though C-ko was three years older than he. Mike grinned, 'But what do I have to worry about? C-ko falling in love with him?'

He chuckled, but soon after furrowed his brow. 'Wait... that sounds like strong foreshadowing... Maybe that extra-dimensional energy is at work again...'

Mike cast the thought aside. So what, if the Multiverse wanted to mess with them? So long as it was safe fun, it could do whatever it wanted.

A few seconds later, though, he wasn't so sure of that endorsement...

(II. Dreams & Realities)

Sweat beaded on B-ko's brow as she tossed and turned in her luxury bed. Her blue silk nightgown was slightly moist with her sweat, as it normally was when she had the dream. Her eyelids fluttered slightly, and anyone who saw her could tell she was in deep and intense REM sleep.

The dream, however, was something that so few people knew about, yet all had suspected.

Deep within her mind, she was sitting luxuriously on a large, red cushion, across an elegantly laid out oak table from C-ko, seated in a similar fashion, draped in the finest silk. For awhile, they both ate daintily with their hands, with the occasional glance flying across the table.

Soon, B-ko made deliberate slurping sounds as she ate, sucking slightly on a strawberry before eating it, licking the juices off of a piece of fruit before biting into it. These actions did not go unnoticed by C-ko, who simply looked shyly at her and giggled whenever B-ko made an over-obvious move. This didn't daunt B-ko in the least, however.

She patted the pillow beside her. C-ko crawled around to sit there, and B-ko picked a ripe berry and held it for her. Nervously, C-ko ate the offering, looking to B-ko for approval. Her smile only widened,

and she put a dollop of whipped cream on her finger. She offered this to C-ko again.

Still unsure of herself, C-ko licked the whipped cream off of B-ko's finger, much to her approval. She tried this again, with slightly more whipped cream, and C-ko was forced to wrap her lips completely around her finger. B-ko gave a soft sigh of appreciation; things were going well.

She softly caressed C-ko's face, and looked into the big, green, and slightly scared eyes that she'd been chasing for so long. They both stood, and B-ko oh-so-gently brushed C-ko's shoulder, and her silk garment fell to the ground. The young blonde simply stood there, nervous excitement on her face, and B-ko's real-time breathing deepened.

B-ko ran a hand over C-ko's features, gently caressing the dream-form. Eventually, she de-robed as well, and the two stood there, nude. C-ko looked at the seemingly older girl, excitement showing on her face.

Here, B-ko wrapped her arms around C-ko, and slowly descended with her back onto the pillow...

Outside of the dream, B-ko began breathing in short gasps. Her assistant, Asa, who'd been walking in the hallway on her way back from the bathroom, peeked her head inside to look at her sleeping mistress. 'She's dreaming about C-ko, again...' she thought, and moved to her bedside.

She looked down at B-ko, whose nightgown was becoming increasingly moist. Asa wondered if it was all sweat... and judging from what her mistress had told her, she guessed it wasn't. She was about to turn to leave when B-ko snapped awake, breathing deeply. Asa rushed back to her side, putting an arm around her. "Are you okay, mistress?" she asked. Gasping, B-ko replied, "I think so... Oh, Asa..." She put an arm around her assistant, and they embraced. "The dream... it feels so..." She left it open, and Asa simply nodded. "But I feel so lonely..." She looked at her, "If you don't mind, could you..."

Asa nodded again, and without another word slipped into bed with her mistress. The two held each-other for a moment, Asa trying her best to make her mistress' dreams a reality...

Far across town, however, the real C-ko was staring at herself in the bathroom mirror. It wasn't something she did often, but every once and awhile she wanted to remember what she looked like. She knew she was under-developed for being sixteen, but she didn't care much. A-ko was the only person's opinion she worried about, and she seemed to like her as she was.

Most girls, and even A-ko herself, from time to time, worried too much about what boys thought. C-ko simply saw no point in it. Oh, she knew about what boys and girls did with each other (she wasn't THAT naive!), but it just didn't appeal to her. She was more concerned with what she felt was important: Having fun, playing with friends, just being young!

But, as C-ko studied herself, she also wondered why B-ko was always so attracted to her. 'I'm just any girl,' she thought to herself,

'Why would she want me? I don't even like her...'

But, as most things were with her, these thoughts were fleeting, and she eventually donned her nightgown and went to bed. She happily thought of the upcoming visit to Mike's town, and dwelled on thoughts of that to tire her. After drifting off to sleep, she dreamt of warm summers with A-ko, picnics and playgrounds, and all sorts of things that made her happy. She smiled physically, and her dream form laughed and played as she moved from one happy thought to the next.

But eventually, the dream turned an odd corner. She and her dream A-ko were chasing each other through a hedge maze, their laughter leading each other on. Eventually, they ran into the other at its nexus, and giggled as they hugged one another.

"I love you, A-ko. Do you know that?" Her dream form said. "Yeah. I love you, too, C-ko." A-ko's dream form replied.

They laughed and exchanged a friendly kiss on the cheek. But something was wrong. When they touched... when her lips touched A-ko's skin... something felt like it flared up in C-ko... something odd, something that she had never felt before. The two dream forms kissed again, this time lightly on the lips, almost experimentally. The sensation repeated itself, only this time stronger. Oddly enough, the two kissed again, only this time, a deeper kiss than C-ko had ever experienced--

She snapped awake. Something was DEFINATELY wrong...

(III. "Keep out of reach of children!")

Brian gaped at the basement laboratory, amazed beyond words. He'd seen stuff like this in the old movies, but never in person. Test tubes boiled and bubbled with mysterious concoctions, computers ticked away at problem solving tasks... and it was all centered around an odd device that looked like a hell of alot like... like a refrigerator.

"Woah..." Brian finally managed. "What's that?" he inquired, pointing to the converted Frigidaire. "That's what I've been telling you about. THAT'S what can take you anywhere..." Mike responded, trying to sound a little dramatic. "Really? What is it?" "I call it The Crosser. I spent months on it, and it's capable of taking you places you'd never even dreamed of..." "How does it work?" "Oh, now, I'm not sure I can tell you." Mike smiled. "Why not?" "Well, I tell you, you tell a friend, who tells a friend, and so on until WHOOSH, *everyone's* building Crossers!" "Aww..."

Mike chuckled and ruffled his cousin's hair. "Well, I'll tell you a little bit. See that?" Mike pointed to a special housing in The Crosser, which held a glimmering, long-cut emerald. "Wow..." Brian uttered, once again caught speechless. "That emerald is what gives The Crosser its power. I shoot laser beams through it, and it opens a doorway to anywhere you want!"

Brian approached the console of The Crosser with quiet awe. Not only

did his big scientist cousin build this, it was powered by a big, shiny crystal... and it *worked*! He reached out to touch the controls when he caught sight of a big yellow label bearing the warning: "Keep out of reach of children!"

"Very funny." Brian said, and threw a glance at his cousin. "Well," Mike said, "It's pretty powerful. I doubt a kid like you could handle it..."

That was it. It had officially become a challenge. Brian nodded, but secretly resolved to play with the device later. These thoughts were soon lost, though, as the machine began to light up and hum with power.

"Great! They're on their way!" Mike exclaimed. "Who? What?" Brian asked, confused.

The machine's various lights and devices began to thrum with energy, and Brian took a cautious step back. The shining emerald began to react to the phenomenal powers being shunted through its matrix, and an unnoticed pair of chairs beside the Crosser began to spark to life. Brian felt his hair stand on end, and ran to his older cousin.

"M-m-mike? W-w-what's going on?" he uttered, more than a little frightened at the display. "Some people are coming to visit... and I want you to be on your best behavior, hear?"

Brian barely nodded, as two distinct forms began to form on their respective chairs. One was a little taller than the other, and as soon as the forms became defined enough, it was apparent that they were female.

The shorter one began to form first, and it became apparent that she had short blonde hair, large green eyes, and a perpetual smile. The taller one had long red hair, hazel eyes, and a soft smile that eased them both.

Finally, with a surge of crackling and an almighty BOOM, the two girls finished their materialization, and gave a weary sigh.

"Hey!" The blonde exclaimed, and frowned at Mike, "You didn't tell me that would sting!" "Stop complaining, will 'ya?" The brunette fired back at her companion. "You *only* changed universes!" "Humph. Well, he still should'a warned me!" The blonde pouted.

"A-ko! So glad you could make it!" Mike happily said, approaching them. He moved to help her from her chair, and Brian took a hesitant step toward them, getting a good look at her. She seemed normal, but there was something about her that didn't seem quite right. She was TOO pretty and TOO well shaped. She didn't seem like a real person. But judging by how she had just shown up, Brian knew to not judge, and to also be careful.

"A-ko, C-ko, this is my little cousin, Brian." Mike said, and pointed him to them. Brian then turned to look at C-ko...

The daisies in her hair seemed to carry a sense of both innocence and happiness, emotions that Brian could relate to. She was easily his height, and she smiled brightly at him. "Hi!" she said brightly. "My

name's C-ko! Don't you think that's cute? I do! I think it kinda reflects my personality!"

"Oh, C-ko, stop! You're embarrassing me!" A-ko said, and turned to apologize to Brian. "Oh, I don't care! Let it all hang out, I say!" C-ko continued. "C-ko, please!" C-ko then saw her friend's frustration and grinned. "Oh, what a mouth I've got!" A-ko then turned to Brian again. "Hi, there! My name's A-ko!" she said, and extended her hand.

Brian shook it lightly, and looked into her big, hazel eyes. "Nice to meet you..." he managed, taken away by her sweeping beauty. Regrettably releasing her hand, he wondered if these two were some kind of blessing. They were perfect: One was nice and pretty and the other seemed fun. 'This could be great!' Brian thought.

Mike saw the smile on Brian's face, and smiled of the thought of applying one of his warning labels to A-ko. Inwardly chuckling, he led his extra-dimensional friends up to the living room, leaving an oddly dazzled Brian behind...

(IV. The Captain's Favor)

Sunlight streamed through the windows of the Daitokuji Mansion, and its young mistress, B-ko, sat reflectively drinking her coffee. Asa had not disturbed her when she had awakened, and had even managed to get breakfast ready for her. 'I'm lucky to have Asa,' she thought, 'She tries so hard... and yet I want something else...'

She flipped through the morning paper, and an article about the Alpha Cygnan starship caught her eye. Most of it had been destroyed over the past year, although not much damage had been done since the Disneyland there had opened. She and A-ko had a minor fight during the opening party, and a bit of the old observation tower had gone up.

Now, Captain Napolipolita was asking for even MORE donations to rebuild it. B-ko shook her head, 'And my father's going to give her more money, I know it. What he sees in her, I'll never know...'

B-ko was lazily eating a piece of toast when Asa approached her, "Mistress, I know it's very early yet, but you have a visitor." Her eyes widened, "A visitor? Who is it?" "Miss Napolipolita is here. She wishes to see--" "My father. Well, what she does is her business--" "Mistress, she wishes to see you." B-ko stopped, stunned. "Me? Does she say why?" "She says it is a personal matter."

B-ko pondered it. Her father had had an eye on Napolipolita for awhile now, even though she saw no reason for it. Still, B-ko had helped her in the past... perhaps she needed help again. "Send her in." B-ko finally ordered, and within minutes, the gender-bending Alpha Cygnan was standing before her.

The Captain had gone through some lengths to look presentable: she had a fine silk dress on, and her semi-long brown hair was tied back. Her eyes were obscured by the same black sunglasses as they always were,

and her oddly mannish face was set atop a well-trimmed female body. "Miss Daitokuji." She said in greeting; her low, male-sounding voice resounding around the room.

"Captain Napolipolita," B-ko said, struggling a little with the name, "How good to see you. Please sit." She indicated a seat in front of her with rather forced enthusiasm, "How can I help you?"

"Well, B-ko, you know your father and I--" The Captain said, sitting. "Yes, yes." B-ko interrupted, not wanting to hear about them while she was eating. "Well, he can provide me many things. But he cannot provide me the intelligence or finesse necessary to get me ALL that I want." B-ko raised an eyebrow, "Perhaps not..." "But you DO. You repaired my ship once before... I'd like you to try again."

B-ko was lightly stunned. She'd thought that The Captain had come for money, but she was asking for her personal help instead. What had her father told her? There was so much he knew that was damaging, and that was how he kept her leashed fairly close. What had he told her that made her seek B-ko's help again?

"MY help. What do *I* get in return?" B-ko eventually responded. "Once I get off of this planet, I won't need the assets I've built here. You can have them all." Stated The Captain.

The young mistress reclined in thought. The Captain had acquired an amazing amount in her short stay, but the money wasn't what she dwelled on the most. The Alpha Cygnans obviously wanted to bring C-ko back with them, but The Captain had not mentioned it. Had they given up? Probably not. The Captain (and also half of Graviton) knew she liked C-ko, just not the full extent of her feelings. But B-ko had aided the ship's destruction the first time around, so The Captain would be sure to be careful with her words.

B-ko leaned forward again, "Okay. I will help you... on one further condition." "Oh, yes! Anything!" Responded a much happier Captain. "That you abandon your mission and leave C-ko here."

THAT hit The Captain hard. To bring the Princess back had been her highest priority... but once they got back to Alpha Cygni, they could send reinforcements! The Captain smiled, "Absolutely. It's a deal!"

The two exchanged a brief handshake. It was then that B-ko wondered what the hell she'd just gotten into.

(V. Bragging Rites)

Looking around the living room, A-ko realized that Mike's plane of existence would take some getting used to. All of the colors seemed darker and duller. Everything was a bit fuzzier. "Harsher" would have been a perfect description.

"A-ko, I'm so glad you chose to visit," Mike began, and sat across from her on the family couch. He then handed her a cup of tea, "How'd you get the time?" "Well, C-ko and I had some sick days saved up, so we decided to try out the Crosser you sent us." A-ko said from the

chair across from him. "And it worked well, I take it?" "Well, like C-ko said, it *did* sting a little..." Mike frowned. "There's always a critic..." he said. A-ko giggled, "Well, aside from that, it was a good ride." "That's good to know." He looked around, "Where did Brian and C-ko go?" "Hm. I think they went back downstairs..." He sighed. "Well, let's hope Brian doesn't touch anything. There's a lot of power down there." A-ko nodded. "But I'm sure you keep it all reigned in..."

They both knew where they were headed. Ever since that moment in B-ko's mecha, they'd both had feelings for each other. But were these feelings merely dimensional flukes, as Mike himself had suggested? Or was there something more... something genuine that these two people, literally from different realities, shared? A-ko was the envy of every Anime fan-- the usual perfect heroine. Her long, flowing red hair was only complimented by her hazel eyes...

And, as an Anime character, she naturally had... "other" attributes that made her an object of avarice and desire.

On the other hand, Mike was a handsome young man, in his own right. His semi-long black hair even made him akin to Kei, the young man that A-ko had fallen head-over-heels in love with. That was pleasant. Mike also had this set of steel-gray eyes... A-ko seemed to fall into them. His overall appearance had always been lax, but that gave him a sort of roguish charm that she admired.

But was there an actual, *mental* connection? Time would tell.

Meanwhile, down in the basement, Brian was happily showing off some of his cousin's inventions to C-ko, who watched with awe. So many nifty buttons! Which ones to push first...

"So, what can you tell me about this, Brian?" C-ko asked, indicating one of the many lab tables. "Oh, that... I can't tell you about THAT. That's top secret. Mike's working on it for the government!" Brian fibbed. "Ooh!" She responded, and flitted from thing to thing, asking Brian about them. He lied in almost every count, but it mattered little. They were both secretly studying one another.

'Gee, he's nice...' thought C-ko. 'I wonder how old he is?' 'She's nice...' Brian thought, 'But...'

Brian was just barely evolving past the point where girls were "icky", and he was just now taking an interest in them. She was nice enough... but what he heard that the older boys did... could he do that to C-ko? He chose not to right away.

"Oooh! Brian? Can you show me The Crosser?" C-ko asked.

Brian moved to comply... but then the large, yellow warning label seemed to jump out at him. "KEEP OUT OF REACH OF CHILDREN!" it seemed to scream at him. He only frowned at it. "Sure thing! Step aside, C-ko! I'll show you what this thing can do!"

Securing the bragging rights for himself, Brian strode up to the console... with no clue in Heaven's name as to what he was doing. But these were HIS cousin's inventions... he was proud and had a right to be. Now, he was going to try to impress C-ko... even if it meant

"BSing" his way straight through it.

'Let's see...' Brian thought, 'One of these has to be the start button.'

He looked at the console and, trusting to fate, he pushed the first button he saw. With a snap and a hum, the Crosser suddenly came to life-- its console lit up, the screen danced with images, and the steady, loud *hum* that he'd heard upon A-ko and C-ko's arrival filled the room. But this time, it went further. The screen displayed images of a modern cityscape... a city situated around a large bay, with an odd small island in the center.

"Ooh!" C-ko exclaimed. "That's our home! Graviton City!" "It is? I mean, of COURSE it is!" Brian said, bravado filling his every pore. "What part do you want to see?" "Can you show me A-ko's house? I always wanted to see it from the air."

Brian turned back to the console as if he knew what he was doing, and tried to find a way to move the image. Noticing a trackball built into the side, he experimentally rolled it. Sure enough, this controlled the image, and with some effort, he focused in on the home of A-ko Magami.

"Oooh! Can you show me the alien space ship, now?" C-ko asked. Again, with some effort, Brian found the large Alpha Cygnan vessel. "Wow. Brian told me it was big..." "Yeah, well you never had to crash in it."

Again, looking at the console for another way to impress C-ko, Brian hit the jackpot. A big red button. Every machine had one, and most of the time, it did something important. He looked at it; it had no label, no markings, no indication as to what it did. But it was a BIG RED BUTTON. Everything in his body cried out to push it.

"I'll show you what THIS does!" he said to C-ko, and confidently pressed the Big Red Button.

Within a matter of seconds, he'd wished he hadn't.

(VI. The Second Crossing)

The large, hulking form of Spy D stood on the flight deck of the Starship, more than happy at the prospect of heading home. She was wearing a casual dress, but her muscular form looked like it had no place being in it. The Captain, though, had special-ordered her size ("You are SO hard to shop for!", D seemed to remember her saying), so she was obligated to wear it.

After taking in some more of Graviton Bay, she turned and entered the Vehicle Bay to find some fellow Alpha Cygnans working on SpiderCraft and other machines. They were mostly disassembling them for parts, for far down in the Engine Room, B-ko Daitokuji worked on the seemingly impossible task of restarting the ship's engines. Since starship parts were not easy to find on Earth, they had to dismantle the smaller landing craft for the necessary materials.

A tone rang from the ship's speakers; "This is The Captain. Will D please come to my chambers."

Maneuvering down a drop shaft, D worked her way into The Captain's quarters... and immediately noticed the smell of wine. A lot of it. The room was dark, as it had always seemed to be. D straightened herself out and pointed herself in the general direction she sensed movement in. "Operative D, reporting as ordered, Captain." she said. "Ah, D. Please, come closer." The Captain said, and turned on a low-powered lamp near her couch. She materialized from the darkness, her hair ruffled and unkempt, her clothes blotched with spilled wine. Several empty bottles surrounded her, and she looked up at D with an expression that showed no pain.

D did come closer. "Yes, Captain. How can I help you?" "D... how are the repairs coming along?" The Captain asked, slightly slurring. "They are going well, my Captain. Miss Daitokuji has reported a few minor problems, but it is nothing to concern yourself with." "Excellent. Hand me that bottle."

D handed her an unopened bottle. "Is there anything else, my Captain?" "No, that's okay. Let me know when we're ready, D." "Yes, Captain. I will check in on Miss Daitokuji and report back to you." "Thanks... D?" "Yes, Captain?" "I love you... ." "I love you, too, Captain."

"You alien morons!" B-ko exclaimed as she lobbed a wrench at an Alpha Cygnan Midshipman. "Do I have to do everything MYSELF?!"

She did, indeed, seem to have to do most of the work, as most of her blueprints and instructions were completely incomprehensible to everyone beside herself. She had theories as to the use of the smaller anti-gravity drives to replace the Starship's large one, but it was a long and complicated process. Most of the Midshipman assigned to help her didn't have the foggiest idea as to what to do, so they basically stood as targets for B-ko's tools.

Angrily turning back to the stack of drives, B-ko pondered why she was doing this. Money? Sure, that was part of the equation. But what else was there? Eliminating the competition? Their departure meant one less group vying for C-ko. That had to factor in. But what was the main thing motivating her to do this? She was at a loss to know.

She picked up a socket wrench and looked at the mounting task ahead of her. Her goal was to network the smaller anti-gravity drives into one large drive, but the power demands would be slightly higher. She could get the ship in the air, probably into space, but there would be no power for weapons. To say NOTHING about the StarDrive. But The Captain only wanted to get back into space, and that's what B-ko would provide.

Over the past few hours, she had mounted half of the necessary drives. According to her calculations, the current Engine Array could keep the vessel in the air, but could not lift off. Wiping some sweat from her brow, she realized how much more of a job there was ahead of her.

'Take what I've done so far...' she thought, looking at the Array, 'And double it.' She sighed. 'Is it worth the money?' But that was

ALOT of money...

As she kneeled beside the Array to begin again, she heard the noticeably heavy footsteps of D behind her. Paying her little mind, B-ko set to connecting one of the smaller anti-gravity drives. "I'm working as fast as I can, D. Badgering me won't help." "I realize that, Miss Daitokuji, but The Captain simply wants a status report." B-ko emitted a slight grunt as she torqued a generator into place. "Well, see this?" she said, and indicated her current progress. "Yes?" "Take that and double it. THEN I'll be done." "Oh! Uhm... how long will that take?" "Well, since it's only me... UGH!" She jammed an errant bolt into place, "Take how long *I've* taken and DOUBLE it." "So that means..." She stopped altogether and looked at D, almost amazed at her density. "Another day... AT LEAST." "Oh. Well, I'll--"

Suddenly, the ship lurched with incredible force, and everyone within the cavernous Engine Room was thrown to the Port side of the ship. Landing on top of an unsuspecting Midshipman, B-ko let loose an angry cry. "Oh, hell!" she exclaimed, "Now, it'll take me even LONGER to get this damn job done!"

Then, as quickly as it has tipped, the ship evened out again. Rising slowly to her feet, D called out, "Alright! Status report! What the hell just happened?" Various Midshipmen moved to reply. Finally, one said, "We've been brought into the air, Commander!" "What?! Are the engines still off-line?" "Affirmative! Sensors also detect a STC rip directly above us!" "STC?" "Space-Time Continuum." Replied B-ko. "There's a rip in the fabric of space... and it's drawing us in!"

B-ko, D, and a host of other Alpha Cygnans leaped to the nearest porthole to see Graviton City... and indeed their own dimension... slip away from them...

(VII. The Visitors)

Mike stormed down the stairs, almost blind with fury. "I TOLD him not to touch ANTHING!" he said, shortly after the Crosser's alert siren went off. "Mike, be reasonable. He's just a kid!" A-ko said, running after him. "Oh, I'll be REASONABLE alright. Not like I'm MAD or anything!!"

Hearing the loud footsteps of his older cousin, Brian turned to face the landing. "Mike! I didn't mean to do it!" "Didn't mean to do what?!" Mike said, and he stormed to the Crosser's console. "Good God!" "What is it?" A-ko asked, leaning over the console with him. "My... DEAR COUSIN... activated the Remote Transport Sequence. It's very experimental, but in theory, it could pull something from another dimension without the help of a Crosser." "Without a Crosser? How's that possible?" "Well, it works by tearing a rip in the Space-Time Continuum near the object and pulling it through. But it's not supposed to be working... my projections showed that massive amounts of graviton particles would be needed..."

"Woah..." C-ko emitted. She was staring out of the window, and had been for the past few minutes. The look on her face was at first

amazement, then it moved to cold dread... "NOO! GO AWAY!" She yelled at the window, and ran into the arms of a confused A-ko. "C-ko! What's the matter?" she asked. "THEY'RE HERE!" C-ko cried, and shakily pointed at the window.

Mike walked to the window and parted the curtain. He simply stood there a moment, taking it all in. Without another word, he ran upstairs and out of the house, all of the others trailing behind. "WHAT?!" A-ko yelled, catching up with him. Then, she saw it. The massive form, beginning to block out the sun... The seven-mile-long form fell a bit, but then stabilized and slowly moved forward. The arrowhead form of the UFO began to blot out the sun, and several gasps were emitted by those present. Mike, A-ko, and C-ko knew what it was immediately. "Mike..." Brian began meekly, "What is that?" There was a sizable pause before he responded, and the object's shadow fell over the gathering. "It's an Exploration/Recovery starship, sent to look for the Fourth Princess of the Fifth Queen of the Lepton Kingdom of Alpha Cygni... Currently under command of Captain Napolipolita..."

The starship then seemed to slow, even hover over the small neighborhood. "And I'm guessing she's pissed..." he finished. "Yeah. And she's probably mad, too." A-ko thought aloud.

"What's happening?!" exclaimed The Captain, racing to the nearest elevator shaft. She was in the middle of a drink when the ship lurched off the ground, causing her to lose a perfectly good bottle of wine. And NOTHING made her angrier than wasted wine.

Storming onto the makeshift bridge of the Starship, Captain Napolipolita began calling out orders that she hadn't in almost two years. "Status report! I want an all-decks report and current Engineering status... and get me a drink!"

Midshipmen moved to reply, and The Captain hit the nearest Comm panel. "D! What's happening?!" "We're still trying to figure that out, Captain. But I do think it's safe to say that we're NOT in Graviton City anymore." "But I thought Miss Daitokuji wasn't finished with the Array, yet." "She's not." The Captain took an instrument readout from the hands of a passing Midshipman, "But our sensors say we're 30,000 feet in the air..." "We are."

There was a pause as The Captain attempted to absorb it all. "We're in trouble, aren't we?" "I'd have to say yes, Captain." B-ko burst onto the line, "Captain, I need to activate the Array, or what we have of it. Otherwise we'll hit the ground like the meteor that hit Graviton! And fair alot worse!" "Meteor? No meteor hit Graviton--" The Captain began. "Captain! Ix-nay!" hissed D into the comm. "Oh, yeah, right...."

The Captain eagerly took a glass of wine from her attending Midshipman and drank from it. "Well, do whatever you have to, just don't wreck my ship any more than you already have!"

Down in Engineering, B-ko ran to comply. She threw the massive switch that she had wired into the Array, and a loud hum arose from the bowels of the ship. The Array of small anti-gravity drives came to life, and whined hard with the production of graviton particles.

"Lieutenant!" called The Captain. "What's our rate of decent?" "3.2 meters per second, Captain!" responded the Navigator. "Engineering! Get that damn thing working!"

"What do you think we're doing?!" exclaimed B-ko, and she ran frantically to shunt more power to the Array. Throwing a few more switches, the generators whined even more loudly than before.

"Rate of decent?" "Three meters per second!" "Come ON, down there!"

"Quickly, D! Hand me that portable generator!" B-ko yelled, indicating a small fusion generator, normally used for emergency lights. D moved to comply, The Captain's repeated cajoling ringing from the Comm panel. Sweating profusely, B-ko worked plasma conduits and energy lines together.

"Current rate?" "1.3 meters per second!" "Almost there! Come on, B-ko!"

B-ko scrambled around for another source of energy. There HAD to be something else... something she'd forgotten... some other source of power... "D! Are there any other sources of power?" "No! The main reactor burned out during your last summer vacation!" B-ko inwardly groaned, remembering the escapade that had laid up her father for months. The damn fool had tried to hold up the Starship... even with a version of B-ko's Power-Suit on, it was far too large, and his back simply broke. Thanks to modern medicine, however, he was simply laid up for awhile.

"Wait! What about solar sails? Do you have any?" B-ko exclaimed. "What the-- yes! We do! But they're folded in the Shuttle Bay!" D responded. "But there are power hook-ups there, right?" "Yes! We must hurry!"

"B-ko! D! What's going on?!" roared The Captain. D pulled a communicator from her belt, "We're going to hook up some solar sails, to provide some more power to the engines. How fast are we falling?" "We've shut off all non-essential systems and have transferred the power to Engineering. We're still falling, but only at a half-meter per second." "That gives us about ten minutes!" B-ko said, running as fast as she could. She cursed herself for not wearing her Power-Suit... she had it in the quarters The Captain had assigned her, but had failed to wear it. She was losing precious time.

In three minutes, they had made it to the Shuttle Bay. "Quickly, get the solar sails and start unfolding them! I'll ready the hookups!" B-ko said, and D did as she was told.

The Alpha Cygnan pulled the great, rectangular blocks of solar panels from behind a bulkhead and proceeded to unfold them from stacks into great sheets. B-ko did as she had indicated, and began preparing power conduits.

"D! B-ko! What's going on? We've got two minutes left before we drop too low to get back up! What's the holdup?!" The Captain cried into the comm.

B-ko and D began to drag the large solar sail out onto the Flight Deck, which was composed of dozens of small solar panels. Their idea

was simple: hoist the sail up a large communication array, much like a cloth sail, where it would collect energy. But they had only two minutes...

"D! Without my Power-Suit, you're the stronger one! Start hoisting that thing up, I'll connect the power lines!" B-ko cried against the increasing winds, and D nodded in compliance.

D quickly attached a series of cables to one end of the sail, and B-ko ran to attach the power feeds. Within thirty seconds, D had connected the sail to the tower, and moved to pull it up. She began to pull on the ropes, the sail scraping the deck as it rose. Slowly, the sail began to rise off of the deck, and climb into the sky.

But D was straining... straining harder than she normally did. She hadn't had to use such strength in quite awhile... had she really let herself go? Would her apathy endanger the whole ship?

B-ko saw her difficulty and ran to help her. "Let your weight do the work..." She advised D, and pulled on the cable. "Miss Daitokuji... Please, you can do little..." D said, sweat covering her brow. "Shut up and pull!" B-ko said, and pulled down on the rope with as much force as she could muster.

The sail rose higher... higher... eventually it cleared the shadow of the Shuttle Bay and was bathed in sunlight, and a grateful D and B-ko tethered it. "B-KO! D! THIRTY SECONDS!!" shouted The Captain through the comm.

B-ko ran to the power conduits, grabbed the solar sail's lead and jammed it into the main socket. Power hummed through the cord and the socket sparked... sending B-ko flying across the Shuttle Bay, and falling with a THUD at the foot of a SpiderCraft.

"B-ko!" D cried out, and ran across the bay to help her. Her hair stood on end, she smelled faintly of ozone... and she did not move.

"You did it!" The Captain jubilantly cried from the Bridge. "We've stopped falling! What's the status, D?"

D looked at the sessile B-ko now in her arms, and with a primal scream yelled into the Comm, "MEDIC!!"

(VIII. "It's not just a city, it's a particle!")

Mike ran his hands over the console of the Crosser, trying desperately to find the cause of the Alpha Cygnan's Crossing. "I simply don't understand it..." he kept repeating, and called up status report after status report, scratching his head with possibility.

"Perhaps it was a sudden graviton burst... but where would that have come from?" Mike said, and started a few scans with the Crosser. "What's all this talk about Graviton?" C-ko asked. "How can a city burst?" "Not our home, silly!" A-ko interjected. "It's not just a city," Mike explained, "It's a particle. A graviton is an ultra-dense

particle used in the creation of artificial gravity. But it's rarely found in nature, so how did enough of them get together to bring the Starship over here?" "You know, I seem to remember B-ko saying something about going to the ship after school..." A-ko put in. "B-ko... Was she carrying any tools?" "I think so. Why?"

Mike slapped his forehead. "Of course! If she was able to get the anti-gravity drives working..." He tapped furiously on the Crosser's keyboard, "They just might be able to produce enough gravitons to carry the ship across the boundary!" "So B-ko's on board the Starship?" Mike nodded. "And the second she finds out you guys are here..." "Then we'd better leave. I don't want to tear up your home fighting her--" "No, I'll need your help to send her back."

Mike hit a few more controls and a loud beep resounded from the Crosser. "There. The Crosser's locked. Now all we need is for a surge of gravitons to build up. A large enough power surge in the anti-gravity drive might just do it." "But we can't do that from down here, can we?" "Afraid not. We'll have to go up there..."

The entire gathering stared out of the window at the massive starship. It was a minute or so before C-ko declared, "NO WAY am I going up there!" "Oh, C-ko, what will you have to worry about? They'd have to Cross back to take you anywhere." A-ko said, attempting to comfort her friend. "I don't care! Remember what almost happened between B-ko and me the LAST time we went through all this? She almost kissed me!" "WHAT?! You never told me that!" "I figured Mike would have told you..." A-ko glared at Mike. "Well, they WERE dancing awfully close..." "Ohhh!" A-ko grumbled. "Fine! We can talk about this later. Right now, we have to get them back home. And to do that, we need to get on-board." "I know!" Mike exclaimed, seeming to have an idea, "Once B-ko finds out you're down here, she'll want to come and fight you!" "But how will she know I'm down here?" "Hm. Good point."

A clock chimed in the distance. "Six o'clock." Mike stated. "The sun will be setting. NOT good conditions for combat." "So what do we do? Just wait for morning? That's crazy! She could attack in the night!" A-ko protested. "I don't think she will. B-ko wants to defeat you... but she wants to defeat you in front of *everybody*." "Well, you're probably right there. I guess we should stay the night..." "Hoo-RAY!" Cried C-ko, "A sleep-over!" Mike rolled his eyes and sighed. This small visit was turning into quite a chore...

Spy D looked down upon the sessile form of B-ko, filled with worry. 'What would they think back home if I allowed a co-worker to die?' she thought to herself. 'Even one such as this Daitokuji girl... she was still working with me. It is still my responsibility to see that she lives.'

Simply staring at her awhile, D felt her own mortality. B-ko had taken alot of voltage, and their machines were doing their best to keep her alive and help her. But... all of those dangerous years working as a Special Operative Spy for the Alpha Cygnan military came back to her... reminding her of all the close calls she'd had.

A laser bolt on Tauros. A large boulder on Celeron III. A spear on Fortuna. All of those things nearly killed her, but she had never given them a second thought. Now... seeing the rich, powerful, and insanely beautiful B-ko Daitokuji lying there, and just as mortal and

vulnerable as she was...

"What's her status, D?" asked the Captain, ambling up. She seemed remarkably coherent. She'd probably attained the perfect alcohol/blood level-- no telling how long it'd last, though. "She's stable, Captain, but the Doctor isn't sure. She took alot up there..." The Captain noticed the pained look on D's face. "Is something the matter, D?" "Well frankly, Captain, yes. She was under my guidance... *I* should have been the one who plugged that conduit in..." "Ahh. I get it. *You're* feeling guilty about what happened. Well, being in command, I get that feeling alot." "Really, Captain? What do you do?" "Well, a good drink helps. But I also remember that 'A', these people accepted the dangers when they signed onto the Corps, and 'B', nine times out of ten, they gladly accept these dangers as a part of their daily duties. Otherwise, life would be boring, right?" D nodded silently. Had B-ko accepted the possible dangers? She had only come aboard the Starship as means to an end. She would not have gone to her death for the Alpha Cygnan flag as gladly as one of the Midshipmen would have. The large ex-spy simply stared at B-ko for the longest time, contemplating how precious life was...

And how she might have gladly traded in her power for a life of boredom...

(IX. Timely Romance)

"Say, Mike, where ARE your parents, anyway?" A-ko asked, slipping away to change her clothing. "Well, my mother's away on business, and my father lives in a completely different country. He's a researcher for a biotech company... the name escapes me at the moment..." Mike said, changing as well from another room. "Well, now I know where you get it from!" A-ko said from behind a door. "All of that ingenuity... all of those gadgets!" "Some of it came from dad, but the rest--"

He paused as A-ko walked out, dressed in a pink silk pajama outfit that seemed to flow directly over her. "--From me..." he finished, barely regaining his composure. "Are you okay?" she asked. "Hm? Oh, yeah. It's just..." He motioned toward her. "You look great." "Oh, really?" A-ko said, and looked over herself. "Well, I didn't know your mother wore my size..." "Actually, that's too small on her." He took a few tenuous steps toward her. "But it seems to fit you perfectly." A-ko smiled nervously. "Yeah..." she said, half-chuckling. She remembered the awkward moment in B-ko's last Mecha, when she was thrown on top of him. Their eyes had locked... and she'd kissed him. Now, a few months later, they were standing there... completely un-watched...

And so they stood...

"Hey! Get off me!" C-ko yelled. "No way!" Brian shouted. "I've got you pinned!" "Not so rough!" "What, you can't stand me?" "You didn't even give me a chance!" "Well, is it *my* problem you can't get on top?" "Okay, okay! Just stop hurting me!"

Brian pressed 'Pause' on the controller. "Ha-ha! I win!" He exclaimed, and reset the PlayStation. "No fair! You never let me get

used to the game!" C-ko said, half pouting. "You're from Japan, and you've never played Tekken?" "I've never even HEARD of it!" "That's weird..." "Well, I don't wanna play any more..." C-ko announced, and threw her controller on the ground, crossing her arms. "Aww! Come on, C-ko! One more game!" "NO! You don't play fair!"

C-ko got up from the living room floor and stomped off, pouting. 'He thinks he's so tough...' she thought, and kicked an errant cat toy. 'I oughta tell A-ko how much of a butt-head he's been...' She moved into the den and sat on another couch, soon joined by Mike's cat. The small gray feline looked up at her, and meowed curiously.

"Hello, kitty." she said, and scratched his head. "You know, I feel sorry for you. Putting up with that little butt-head." "I heard that!" Brian exclaimed from the living room. C-ko simply fumed, and scratched the cat's head again. "Mike must be nice, though. He can make all of these neat little toys for you..."

She picked up one of the toys: a little motorized ball that rattled. She smelled it. "Ooh, Catnip! He must really care for you, kitty." The kitten pawed at the ball, and she rolled it in front of him. The tabby cat passed the little ball between its paws, and C-ko sighed happily.

"I wonder if he cares for A-ko like that..."

A few minutes passed, and they continued to look at each other. It then occurred to Mike that he'd not completely finished his task, and was standing there in his plaid boxers. "Oh, erm..." he mumbled, and slipped on some sweat pants. A-ko giggled. "You don't have to. You really look great." she said, and bit her lower lip. 'Oh, yeah, GREAT move!' she thought. 'Now you've made a complete ass of yourself!' "Nah... I've got scientist's muscles." he said, and held his arm out. "Look at that! Nothing!" A-ko giggled again. "More than some. You had to've done SOME work... lifting all that heavy machinery..." She cut herself off, once again biting her lip. 'What the hell are you doing?! He's NOWHERE near Kei.. but he has something Kei lacked...' she thought to herself. And so they stood there once again, simply looking at each other, completely unsure of what to do. Mike took another tentative step toward A-ko, and she bit her lip. The air continued to grow heavier as they fell deeper into each other's eyes. Mike took another step, then another.

Eventually he was standing up next to her, his bare chest pressed against the soft silk of her pajamas. Their breathing was definitely quickening as they continued to stare into each other's eyes. Eventually, Mike raised his hand and softly caressed A-ko's cheek, and she closed her eyes, inhaling sharply at the feel of his hand on her flesh.

She slowly parted her eyelids again to look at him... his jet black hair shined in the low lighting of the room, his eyes reflecting little jewels of light back at her... and her heart simply melted. He smiled softly, and she warmed even more.

"Are you the one?" she said softly, and raised her own hand to caress his face.

He closed his own eyes and pressed his face farther into her hand, feeling the slightly worn surfaces of her warrior's hands and yet

also feeling a deep infatuation soaking her every pore. Her words, 'Are you the one?', rang in his head, and he parted his eyelids to gaze deeply into her pure, clear, wonderful hazel eyes.

They had fallen, and fallen hard, for each other.

"A-ko..." Mike began, "Aren't you afraid that this is all just a trick of the Universe? That all of this we feel isn't just misplaced energy?" She pulled his head closer to hers. "Well..."

Their faces grew closer. Mike's shadow fell over A-ko's face, but her eyes mystically maintained their glimmer, and the warmth from their skin was felt before anything else. The nanoseconds they took in coming together seemed like an eternity, until finally, in a climax of synaptic response, their lips pressed and incredible emotions and energies crossed the bridge the two had just made.

The two had kissed. And the kiss lingered for as long as human tolerance would allow...

C-ko crept up the stairs, afraid that A-ko and Mike were already asleep. It was already WAY past her bedtime, so she only assumed that they had already turned in. She poked her head into the guest room assigned to her and A-ko... but there was no one there.

She snuck down the hall a few feet further, looking into Mike's Parent's room, thinking that she might have moved there. No one in there, either.

'Where is she?' C-ko thought, and looked in the bathroom, Mike's Father's office, the closets, and even looked outside of all the windows before she was forced to realize one thing: She had to be in Mike's room. And since HE wasn't in any other rooms, he had to be in there, too.

That meant they were in there together.

They were IN THERE...

TOGETHER?!

A look of cold dread surged across her face. 'Could they...' she thought, 'Would they?'

C-ko slowly walked up to Mike's door and lied down on the floor, looking through the gap. Admittedly, all she saw was feet, but it was two pairs of feet standing FAR too close to each other. She had to see more.

But how? If she opened the door, she'd be noticed. Sitting on the floor, she knew she had to think fast. What if they decided to do something? It was too much for her to bear, so she simply focused on getting to see inside. The room DID have a window, but it was on the second floor. She seemed to remember seeing a ladder in the basement. But she was pretty short. How could she--

C-ko recoiled from the thought the second she had it, but she also had little option.

Everything else had faded from their view. She only saw he, and vice

versa. Their eyes locked, completely entranced by the other. The energies of this timely romance flew about them, and they knew that they wanted to be together. But one question resounded through both their minds.

'Now what?' They had never done this before. A-ko had never been with a guy before, and Mike had never gone farther than fooling around with his last girl friend. Those feelings had never been this intense. There HAD to be a connection... hadn't there?

A-ko had always felt that she and C-ko had this odd connection, something that was LIKE a relationship, but it was never anything physical. And she had given great thought to whether that would make her "that way" or not. Would it even be a problem? It gave her a headache just beginning to think about it.

But now, she was here, with an attractive guy, whom she had feelings for. But was Mike right? Was this all "misplaced energy"? Or was it love?

Mike took the next possible step, the one that seemed the most logical. He ran his hands down A-ko's sides, and she inhaled sharply. Slipping his hands underneath the silk garment, Mike thought frantically about every move he made. Being a scientist, he knew that every move he made had millions of possible outcomes.

And this being an intimate situation, there were millions MORE possible outcomes than normal.

He ran his hands over her stomach, feeling her soft skin. A-ko then took the opportunity to reach out and run a finger over his chest, tracing his muscles. Mike was right in that respect; he didn't have much muscle, but he DID show promise.

Once again, their eyes locked. Mike was barely able to stop from panicking, but he did manage to keep some measure of cool. Finally, he reached farther upward, embracing her.

A-ko reclined her head, feeling the electricity of his touch... having never been touched like that before....

And she DESPERATELY tried to ignore the movement from outside Mike's window.

(X. Confession & Forgiveness)

"I really have no idea why I'm doing this..." Brian protested. "Shut up! You owe me for being such a butt-head!" C-ko replied. "Tell you what, YOU hold ME up!" "No way! This time, *I* get to be on top!"

C-ko shifted her weight on Brian's shoulders. "Look, don't YOU want to know what they're doing in there?" "Well, yeah, but we're not only on a ladder, you're ALSO on my shoulders. Do you have any idea how dangerous this is?" "I'd go through ANY danger to see if A-ko is alright!" "You say that now, but you'll feel differently from a hospital bed!"

C-ko ignored him and peeked over a windowsill into the room. A second later, she wished she hadn't. Mike had his hands... WHERE?!

"NOO! It CAN'T be!" C-ko shouted and let go of the windowsill, causing her to lose her balance. "Wha--- WHAA!!" Brian exclaimed.

His thought was cut short, however, by the force of gravity. Falling backwards, they fell from the ladder into (of all things) the Banks family compost heap. With a fascinating sound the writer does not dare to replicate, they ended up in the heaping mound, un-bruised... but not terribly thankful for it.

"Yuck! I'm gonna be sick!" Brian emoted, and removed a banana peel from his shirt. "It CAN'T be..." C-ko said, simply sitting in the mound of garbage. "Why? What'd you see?" asked Brian, taking a coffee filter off of her head. "Mike was touching A-ko... OH, it just can't be true. It CAN'T!" "Why? What's so bad about touching her?" "You don't understand... he was touching her... here." she said, and indicated the chest. "Oh. That's IS wrong."

The window to Mike's room opened up, and A-ko poked her head outside. "C-ko! Are you okay?" she asked, concerned.

C-ko said nothing, and only sniffed. Erupting into a stream of tears, she ran into the house, leaving a hurt A-ko and a confused Brian behind.

Throwing herself onto the bed, C-ko kept crying. She wasn't even entirely sure WHY she was crying, but she couldn't seem to stop. But the scene kept replaying in her mind... Mike touching A-ko... It seemed to hit her... a pain, deep inside, that she couldn't seem to shake.

A-ko had always been HER friend, HER confidant, HER caretaker. But now, someone else was creeping in. Someone wanted to take A-ko away from her...

The dream she had had before Crossing over came back to her. What was that she had felt? Was it this strange thing that men called love? If that was true... the only person she had truly loved in life had betrayed her.

And so she cried. 'How could she do this to me?' she thought, and tried very hard to think of happy moments with her friend. But the moments were slow in coming, and she continued to cry.

A-ko, meanwhile, stood outside of the door and listened to her friend's tears. What could she do? How much had C-ko seen? What was she feeling right now? Probably alone and afraid.

The odd thing was... she was perfectly ready to give herself to Mike, just like that. Now that she realized that she'd hurt a friend, the clarity of mind she had was astounding. Had she been THAT ready to throw caution to the wind earlier?

Building herself up, she cautiously stepped inside the guest room. "C-ko?" "Don't talk to me! I saw what you let him do to you!" C-ko yelled, still sobbing. "C-ko, please--" "How COULD you, A-ko?! How could you let him do that?" "Please, let me try to explain--" "A-ko!

Didn't you say that you loved me?"

A-ko was caught off guard. "Come again?" "Remember during our first year of school? I told you that I loved you, and you said you loved me, too!" "Well, yeah, I remember that." "Didn't that mean *anything*?" "That was rather adult for C-ko," A-ko thought. She actually said, "Of COURSE it meant something. I really meant it. I still do." "Then why did you let him do that?" "Because... I wasn't sure of HOW I loved you..." "'How'?" "Yeah. Besides... the way he looked at me... the way his skin felt next to mine... Oh, C-ko, I could have DIED. It felt so wonderful!" "I don't see how." "Oh, but it DID. You know, C-ko, we share a unique feeling."

She crossed over to sit beside her friend on the bed. "But from time to time, a girl needs a *different* kind of love." "What kind?" "Oh, gee. THAT'S kinda hard to explain... Uhm, well, it's more physical... you just get this NEED for someone other than your best friend." C-ko simply stared at her. "You're all I've ever needed, A-ko."

She had floored A-ko. The poor redhead was feeling guilt, happiness, and a dozen different emotions all at once. Yet C-ko's sweet, emerald eyes spoke the solid truth, and she was forced to be guilty most of all. C-ko had never felt the need for a man, or anyone else for that matter.

There were times when A-ko really admired that.

"C-ko... do you really mean that?" she inquired, feeling a slight tear in her eye. "You bet I do, A-ko. I've never needed any stupid old boy to replace you. You've ALWAYS been there for me, and I ALWAYS feel good when I'm around you." "Oh, C-ko--" "It's true! Who saves me from B-ko everyday? YOU do! Who's always there for me... to save me from aliens, angry robots, or jerk boys? YOU are! Who's always there to just BE there when I need a hug? YOU are!"

"A-ko, you're all I've ever needed... or wanted."

A tight-lipped smile formed on A-ko's lips. Finally unable to contain itself, a teardrop fell from her eye, rolling down her cheek. No one had ever said anything like that to her; not her other friends, not Mike, not even her parents had spoken anything quite like that.

And the look in C-ko's eyes told that she spoke the truth.

"Oh, C-ko..." A-ko tried, but there were no words for what she was feeling. Finally giving in to emotion, she threw herself into a hug and cried softly on her friend's shoulder. "How could you ever forgive me?" "I already did, silly." C-ko said, and moved A-ko to look in her eyes. "Don't you remember?" "C-ko..." her friend said, after a sizable pause; "Do you mind if I tell you how much I love you?"

And the blonde only smiled. "I love you too... even if you DO drive me insane..."

The two giggled in each other's company, confessed and forgiven.

"I still can't believe you did that!" Brian exclaimed. "Oh, DO shut up. How do you think *I* feel?" Mike retorted.

The two were downstairs, Mike pouring himself a drink, and Brian listening intently to his tale of heartbreak. Well, it might not have been "heartbreak", per se, but it was a hell of an upset.

"Perhaps it's for the best," Mike said, and poured himself a glass of his father's Port. He drank the dark wine slowly, savoring the sweetness of it. "Maybe it is..." Brian returned, sipping his own glass of Coke. "But you're the older one. Normally, I'd come to YOU with this sort of problem." "Well, I COULD talk to myself, but I always know what I'm going to say." "That could be a problem, yeah."

Mike took another drink. "I mean, she's not even from the same DIMENSION as I am. It couldn't have worked out, right?" "Probably not. I heard someone say, 'Long distance relationships NEVER work'." "Well, they're probably right. Besides... I know that she and C-ko were drawn for each-other..." "'Drawn'?" "Nevermind. But you're right..." he took another drink, "It just wasn't meant to be." "Well, Mike, there's plenty of other girls out there. I'm sure you were written for one."

Mike looked at his cousin. "What was that?" "I said you were meant for one. What?" He shook his head. "Nothing. Everything just made sense for a second, that's all."

(XI. History Repeats)

Everything was blurry. There was a big red and tan blob to her right, and everything else was a big blue blob. She tried desperately to focus, but it only sent a searing pain into her head.

"B-ko!" The red and tan blob shouted, sending resounding pain through her mind. "Captain! She's waking up!"

A purple and brown blob came into her view on the left. "So she is," came another voice, sending smaller tremors of pain. "B-ko? Can you hear us?" "Uhhhh..." she emitted, and again tried to focus. Against the screaming objections of her neurons, she managed to define the forms of Captain Napolipolita and Spy D, standing by her bed. Bed? Since when had she been in bed? "Wha-- what happened to me?" "You were holding the wrong part of the power coupling. When you connected the solar sail, you had several thousand volts sent through you. You're very lucky to be alive." D explained. "Really? Doesn't feel like it..."

She tried to sit up, but then decided against it. "Do we know where we are, yet?" "Yes. We're on Earth, but our dimensional signature is all wrong. Oddly enough, we're not even on the same continent-- "Yes, yes. Tell me, what's the dimensional signature?" "5.378 Terahertz. Why?" "5.378... Why does that sound familiar...?"

Thinking was a very painful task for B-ko at this moment, but she tried anyway. She associated that frequency with someone... a man... And he had something she wanted... a crystal? No... an *emerald*. And that frequency... it was entered into some machine...

The whole episode came to her in a flash. "Oh, no..." "What? What is

it?" inquired the Captain. "Do you know something?" "You bet I do. There's someone down there..."

B-ko sat up on the bed, no longer feeling the pain. It had been taken over by sheer determination. "There's someone down there who wronged me. And now... NOW, I can revenge."

A-ko awoke to find C-ko in her arms. Apparently, they had fallen asleep together... she seemed to remember a bout of tickling that wore them both out. Arising quietly, she went away to shower.

Mike, meanwhile, had already been awake. He was sitting on top of his roof, watching both the sunrise and the media circus surrounding the appearance of the Starship. Reporters and military personnel were everywhere, and he was sure that B-ko was getting a kick out of it.

"Mike?" A-ko called, her voice coming from a nearby window. "Up here, A-ko." he responded, and stomped on the roof. A-ko poked her head out, and, weighing the options, climbed across an overhang to where he sat, watching everything in his neighborhood. "Nice view." she said, her hair still wet.

Mike looked at her, clothed in a loose conglomeration of what they found could fit her. 'How can she be so damn beautiful?' he asked himself. 'I know she and C-ko were meant... were FATED for each-other... but...'

"So, what's the plan?" A-ko asked, breaking his reverie. "Well," he began, bringing his gaze to the Starship, "The Captain's undoubtedly watching the local media broadcasts of her arrival, so all we have to do is be seen by them. B-ko will come down, I will go up and arrange a power surge. We'll have to send B-ko home by the Crossing Chair, but we'll burn that bridge when we come to it."

A-ko nodded silently. What had happened between the two of them had not been forgotten, but she'd made a decision. Mike was a strong, capable man, and could do without her. Whereas C-ko needed her. She'd probably live to regret it, but she chose to stay with C-ko... her best friend for as long as she could remember. Her charge. Her confidant. And... and someone she truly loved.

"B-ko, I WILL NOT stand for this! Your father wouldn't either. Get back to that BioBed now!" The Captain shouted. "My father's not here, and you CERTAINLY aren't my mother!" B-ko returned, changing from the hospital-gown into her Akagiyama-23 battle suit. "Don't be so sure of that." B-ko couldn't have rounded faster. "WHAT?!" "He's really in love with me, B-ko, and the feeling is mutual." "Well, no vows have been exchanged yet, and I need to get my revenge..."

Clamping an arm brace on, she completed the transformation. She powered up the bio suit and ran down the hall far faster than the guards could stop her, contemplating exactly how she would kill Michael Banks.

"Do I HAVE to wear my uniform, A-ko?" C-ko asked, tugging at the annoying garment. "It's the only way B-ko will be sure see us." A-ko reasoned, changing into her own school uniform.

The girls were in the next room changing while Mike prepared the

necessary tools for his sabotage. He put what he thought he needed into a kit, but the Alpha Cygnan technology was probably light-years ahead of anything he knew. With his luck, nothing would be compatible with the tools he'd have.

Even the European Adapter kit might be useless.

Shouldering his new kit, Mike waited patiently outside the door. He heard the ruffling of clothes and began to consider his decision to leave well enough alone. She was an Anime... someone who, under normal circumstances, he would never be able to talk to, much less touch. Or love.

'This IS for the best...' he kept telling himself, but he didn't believe it. Had he been that deprived, that he wanted the company of an imaginary woman over that of a real one? He told himself to stop thinking about it... it solved nothing and only gave him a headache.

And THAT was when the ground began to shake.

B-ko didn't even activate her jetpack immediately; she simply jumped off the deck of the Starship, looking for the 'Banks' name near a house. It wasn't until she nearly flattened herself, and several TV reporters, that she activated the jets and soared down the streets, blind with rage and revenge coursing through her veins.

"Revenge is sweet, sweet, SWEET... and you, Michael, are going to die, die, DIE!" she exclaimed, looking frantically for his home. She swept her eyes left and right, looking intently at the mailboxes, letting her wrath grow and ferment.

Until she saw the right box. "Banks--2501 Ferrer Dr."

Grinning devilishly at the prospect of revenge, she unleashed a battery of Akagiyama Missiles at the home, now sure of her revenge against Michael Banks...

Glass began to shatter, walls were torn asunder, and Mike began to doubt that he'd get the house alone, again. "Shit!" he exclaimed, "How did B-ko know we were down here?" A-ko and C-ko ran from their room, now wearing their uniforms. Mike looked at the shattering windows and flying plaster surrounding them, and couldn't help but remember A-ko's first adventure, when B-ko had realized who they were. Was it history repeating itself? If so, it only meant that A-ko would win, and everything would be okay.

He tried to tell himself that, but it didn't seem to work.

"Don't worry, Mike. I'll stop her!" A-ko yelled against the chaos, and ducked a chunk of wall plaster. "Please! A house is alot harder to replace in THIS dimension!" Mike implored, and watched A-ko leap off into action. "C-ko! Come with me!"

Mike led C-ko down into the basement, hoping that history would not repeat itself here....

A-ko burst from what used to be the front door of the Banks home, not attempting to hide the anger she had once again for B-ko. It seemed that no matter what she did, B-ko was always there to cause trouble.

Whether it was with C-ko, or Kei, or her job, or ANYTHING ELSE for that matter, B-ko was there. Whatever A-ko had or wanted, B-ko also had to have. Preferably at the cost of depriving A-ko of what *she* had.

Now, she was trying again. And A-ko was not about to stand for it. "B-KO!" She shouted, and the missile barrage stopped.

"A-Ako?!" B-ko returned, flabbergasted. 'How could SHE be here?' she thought violently to herself. Then it hit her. 'Of COURSE! If HE was with A-ko... this must've all been an elaborate plan to trap me! Well, she won't get away with it!"

"B-ko, why don't you and I go outside of town and talk this over?" A-ko asked, trying to distract her so Mike could get on-board the Starship. "Oh, no, A-ko! You've probably set a trap for me, there... not like it would WORK. We end this NOW. I get you, then I get that pissant Banks." B-ko said, re-arming her Akagiyama Missiles.

A-ko then took this opportunity to spring for B-ko, knocking her off course and causing her missiles to destroy a nearby news van. The reporters were torn between wanting to run for their lives and wanting to catch what had quickly become the story of the century... but they knew what to do. They were shallow, not stupid.

"Grrr! A-ko, you're only putting off the unavoidable!" B-ko cried, and dealt her a hard blow to the neck, sending her deep into the sidewalk cement. "Look, we can fight to the death for all I care, just get AWAY from the city!" A-ko said, and began dashing for the nearby forest.

B-ko answered with a hail of missile fire. At least that meant she was following her. Now all she needed to do was distract her long enough for Mike to get up to the ship...

(XII. The Fourth Princess of the Fifth Queen of the Lepton Kingdom of Alpha Cygni)

Captain Napolipolita and D scrambled into one of the few remaining working transport craft and prepared to search the ground below. The Captain had promised B-ko's father that if she hired her on any further commissions that she would keep her safe. So the Captain had decided to take it upon herself to bring B-ko back to the ship before she could cause any trouble in this strange dimension.

"Have you got a bead on her Battle Suit, D?" The Captain asked as the transport lifted off of the flight deck. "Affirmative, captain. She's apparently stopped at one of the primitive dwellings below." D said, checking the craft's advanced radar equipment. "Then set a course... and hand me a drink, will you?"

The explosions had stopped, at least for the time being. Mike slowly started up from the basement, hoping that A-ko had succeeded in luring B-ko away. Now all he had to do was get aboard the Starship... he wasn't entirely sure HOW, but he'd figured that he'd burn that bridge when he came to it.

"M-mike..." C-ko uttered, understandably scared, "I-is it over?" "I hope so, C-ko..." Mike responded, and opened what remained of the basement door.

A good portion of the front of the house was gone, and this provided a nice view of the front lawn. No A-ko or B-ko. Mike lead the frightened young girl back upstairs, and she looked out of the gaping hole in surprise.

"Ohhh..." she emitted, then suddenly turned angry, "That B-ko! She's ALWAYS causing trouble!" "You're telling me... My house..." Mike said, and wandered aimlessly toward what used to be the front door. "My beautiful house..." "I'm sorry, Mike..." C-ko said, genuine regret in her voice.

C-ko picked up a broken china cup and tried to put the handle back on. Mike smiled lightly at the innocent young lady. 'To think that C-ko has caused so much...' he thought. 'Still... I've got to get back to the task at hand... how to get up there?'

Mike's train of thought, however, was cut short by the sound of whining engines. Engines that Mike recognized from his previous visit as Anti-Gravity engines. Without much further ado, a lens-shaped craft landed near Mike's front lawn.

C-ko recoiled in terror. "NOOO!!" "It's okay, C-ko-- run down to the basement, quick!"

C-ko was more than happy to comply. Making sure that C-ko was tucked away safely, Mike ran out to the craft.

"I'm afraid she's moved on, Captain. It looks like she's headed for the nearby forest." "Well, get on with it then! We don't want to loose her!"

TAP-TAP-TAP "What was that?" The Captain said, startled. *TAP-TAP-TAP* "Something on the windshield, maybe?" D thought aloud, and de-activated the sunblinds. They were soon startled to find Mike sitting on the large shield. "Excuse me?" he said, his voice muffled by the thick glass. "My name's Michael Banks... can I ask for a ride?"

"Will you STOP MOVING?!" B-ko yelled, firing at an escaping A-ko. The heroine had managed to find some cover in the nearby forest, evading her flying nemesis by using the large trees as cover. Admittedly, the Forestry Commission would have a hell of a job ahead of them, but A-ko would apologize if necessary.

Right now, she would just concentrate on surviving TO apologize.

"B-ko!" A-ko cried, ducking a falling tree, "What do you think C-ko would say about all of this?" "C-ko?" B-ko replied, and stopped firing. It wasn't all that difficult to stop her from rampaging-- simply mention the name of her "love". "Yeah... What would C-ko say if she saw you firing at me like this?"

B-ko thought that over. C-ko had said she strictly disapproved of their arguing, and since B-ko only wanted to make C-ko happy....

"Fine! I'll leave you alone for now! But now I have to take care of that double-crosser Banks!" B-ko resolved, and flew off again for the city.

"You know the location of the Princess?" The Captain said, quite eager. "That's right. I know of your mission." Mike said. "All you have to do is Cross back, and I'll give you her location. She's unguarded at present--" "Fine! We'll do whatever you say! We simply HAVE to get the Princess back!" "But, Captain," D began, "Didn't you promise Miss Daitokuji that you would leave the Princess alone?" The Captain grabbed the collar of D's blouse, "D, for the past SIXTEEN YEARS all we've wanted is to take her home! If we can get out of here AND have the Princess, then I'll get the Pilot's Star... YOU'LL get the Intelligence Star... and our mission will FINALLY be complete! B-ko's already getting all of our assets! She let go of D's collar, "Besides... I'm sure she understands ruthlessness..."

D only silently nodded. For once the Captain was determined... she was on task and knew what she was doing. D was not about to stop something that happened as rarely as this.

"Mister Banks... you're saying that all we have to do is start a power surge in the graviton generators, and then we can go home?" "That's right. And you'll also get the location of the un-guarded Fourth Princess of the Fifth Queen of the Lepton Kingdom of Alpha Cygni." "Then we must hurry back up to the ship! D, set a course!"

The large operative did as she was told, and the transport craft shot up into the sky. Mike was well on his way... he was just hoping that B-ko didn't catch up...

Brian stirred from his place on the couch. He felt an odd draft... maybe Mike had rushed out and left the door open. He sat up and rubbed his eyes, startled by the amount of light being let into the room. He was even more startled to find out why.

Moving slowly from the couch, he stared out into the great hole now in the front of the house. Several passers-by were looking inward, and a few gasped at the sight of the young man. "Someone survived!" one exclaimed. "Is he hurt?" uttered another, but Brian didn't seem to hear them.

"Guess I sleep more soundly than I thought..." he said to himself.

It was then that he heard, of all things, a soft weeping. He turned to the basement, the apparent source of the crying. Opening what was once called the basement door, he walked down the stairs to find the small, crying form of C-ko huddled in a corner.

"C-C-ko? Why are you crying?" he asked, walking over to her and kneeling beside her. HE was a bit shaken by all this, too. "*SNIFF* Because I'm scared and I'm cold and I'm hungry and... and... AND A-KO'S GONE!!" C-ko responded, fountaining forth tears. Brian laid a hand on her shoulder in an attempt to comfort her. In reality, he was about ready to join her in her tears. He felt about as confused as she did. What had happened here? Where was Mike and A-ko? For that matter, what had happened to the wall?

"C-ko... can you tell me where Mike and A-ko are?" he asked, attempting to take control. "*SNIFF* Mike went up to the Spaceship... and A-ko went off to fight B-ko AGAIN... *SNIFF*" Brian nodded silently and rubbed her shoulder. The poor girl was probably scared stiff... remembering her kidnapping by the Alpha Cygnans, her separation from A-ko. Brian was just clueless as to what to do. 'Mike's the councilor, not me...' he thought to himself, racked his mind for some words of comfort.

Then it hit him. "Why don't we find A-ko? I'm sure they're done fighting by now..." "*SNIFF* Well... that WOULD be nice..." Brian took her by the hand and led her upstairs, still living each second not knowing what he was going to do the next...

"Banks... You WILL learn that no-one double-crosses a Daitokuji... EVER..." B-ko fumed, flying once again to the Banks residence. A-ko was not far behind, though she doubted that she could do much. She had seen B-ko on rages before, but this was something different. Everything with her and B-ko had been personal before, but this man had betrayed her on a business deal. This must've meant something entirely different to her.

"Not just a quick missile to the head, no... He deserves a taste of many flavors of pain..." B-ko muttered to herself, and A-ko could do little more than roll her eyes. Three years of lines like that were beginning to bog down on her. Sure, A-ko had said similar things, but only when moved to do so by B-ko. Melodrama had always been B-ko's trademark, from the day they'd met. And in a rage like this, she was sure to stick to her pattern of TALKING about revenge more than the actual act.

At least, that's what A-ko was hoping for. That would give her time to warn Mike and get C-ko to a safer place...

Meanwhile, many hundreds of feet above them all, Mike was staring at an alien spaceship engine, wondering what the hell he was doing. Sure, he was there to save the girls and send these gender-bending aliens back home... but WHAT was he DOING up there?!

'I have no clue as to what any of this does...' he kept thinking. 'It only remotely resembles anything I've seen on Earth... This? This could control the generators, OR it could flush the toilets on deck 42... how can I tell?!'

"Captain," D began, lowering her voice, "Are you sure we can trust him?" "D, he's a technician. His mind is so focused on electronics, the thought will NEVER enter his mind to betray us..." "But Captain, we keep getting reports from deck 42--" "Look at him... his mind is a perfectly tuned machine, able to pick up on the computer's problems and diagnose them, without any tools whatsoever..." "Crew are slipping on the deck plates. They think--" "Now, now, D. Can you get your captain a drink?"

The Captain thrust her glass at D. With a sigh, the big Spy took it. "Yes, Captain." she said, and moved to fill it from a nearby bottle. 'She REALLY needs to see some help when we get back...' she thought. 'Am *I* an enabler?'

Mike continued to fiddle with the wires. 'Okay... this will either

start up the engines, or flood decks 41, 42, and 43... Here goes....'

He pressed the wires together with an almighty spark... and resolved to NOT go on decks 41, 42, and 43 for awhile...

"BANKS?!?" B-ko screamed, and promptly destroyed his mailbox. He hadn't hung around for her to destroy him... what a pity. "Come out and FIGHT, you worm!" she said, shattering a window.

This had NOT been her day. First off, she gets several thousand volts sent through her, only to wake up in an alternate dimension. Then, she tries to get revenge on an old enemy when of all people A-KO shows up... And now the center of her revenge (for the time being, at least) had vanished. This city would be lucky if it survived any tantrum she decided to throw.

That was when she heard a soft crying from inside the house. B-ko immediately stopped her fire and listened. It was familiar tears... a crying that she had heard countless times before... the tears of her beloved. The one the Alpha Cygnans had called their "Princess".

"C-ko!" she exclaimed, and flew into the house. A-ko was not far behind, skidding to a stop in front of the ghost of a front door. For a time, the two simply stood there, looking at their fragile love. One again, everything had come down to this little one... this young blonde girl had stopped vengeance and war, JUST long enough, for the world to see a moment of peace.

Everything, once again, had come down to the The Fourth Princess of the Fifth Queen of the Lepton Kingdom of Alpha Cygni...

(XIII. Magic Carpet Ride)

"How's the cleanup proceeding, D?" asked The Captain. "Reasonably well, Captain. They're still scraping toilet paper off of the walls, though." "I see. Hand me another drink..." "Yes, Captain... Oh, and Mister Banks reports that he is making progress." "That's good to hear...."

The Captain took a drink. Once again, she was close to completing her mission: the rescue of the Princess. All she had to do was let Banks fix the ship in such a way so they could travel in between dimensions at will, then she could return home and rescue the Princess. With B-ko stuck in THIS dimension, they could take her home easily.

That girl A-ko would be a small problem, but one she could assuredly work around.

Meanwhile, Mike was making a small degree of progress. He was fairly certain that he had isolated the circuits for the graviton generators, but B-ko's wiring job was confusing at best. 'This might help explain the MAX 5000...' he thought, and did his best to decipher what she had done.

After another hour, he was still only fairly sure as to what he was

doing. But D's frequent visits showed the Captain's growing impatience, so he decided to come to her with what he had done.

The re-furbished Bridge of the Starship was Spartan. It lacked the large picture windows of the original Bridge, as well as the ergonomic control stations that made the Egota class so popular.

No, the Auxiliary Bridge was just that... something to use in case of an emergency. Thus, the sharp angles of the consoles and utilitarian feel of every chair and readout rang through, and Mike noticed this as he entered.

The Captain was seated in the far less comfortable Auxiliary Captain's Chair, and D stood at her side, awaiting her every order. Soon, Mike caught their attention, and he presented his case. "I'm fairly sure I've completed B-ko's work, although there are still some circuits that I'm unsure of. If you are willing to wait, I can make a control circuit here on the Bridge, but as of right now, the Crosser can only be controlled from Engineering."

"No!" The Captain exclaimed. "We cannot wait any longer for our Princess! Prepare to Cross, mister Banks!" "But Captain, with so many uncertainties--" D cut in. "Didn't I just give an order, Operative?" Her sudden air of command surprised D, but her loyalty won out over any reservations she had. "Yes, Captain." "Okay-- all decks! This is Captain Napolipolita. The day we have eagerly awaited is now upon us... we are now ready to rescue the Princess, and return home to Alpha Cygni. Prepare to meet our Queen!"

A cheer went up from the depths of the ship, and the loud hum of power began to resound.

That was, until the explosions began.

B-ko continued to kneel beside the unresponsive C-ko. She felt only the want to take care of and love her dear C-ko, but the young blonde wanted none of it. Once again, it seemed that A-ko was getting in the way.

"Oh, A-ko!" C-ko cried out, attaching herself to the redhead. "I got worried about you!" "I'm okay, C-ko." A-ko responded, trying to calm her. "Where did Mike go?" "I wish I knew! He just told me to go downstairs, then disappeared!"

A-ko seemed to turn this around in her head, and B-ko silently fumed about the whole situation. 'First I can't kill Banks, now A-ko interferes again...' she thought. "Wait! Couldn't Mike have gotten onto the Starship?" Brian chimed in. "That IS possible..." A-ko said. "WHY?" B-ko suddenly demanded. "Er... uhm..."

Everyone was caught silent again. "This is another double-cross, isn't it?! Grrr! Fine! I'll fly right back up there and get Banks for this!!" B-ko said, and took off into the sky, creating ANOTHER hole in Mike's roof.

"Oh, wonderful! We have to stop her!" A-ko exclaimed, stopping a large piece of plaster from falling on them. "But how?" C-ko asked, looking to her friend for wisdom. "Well..."

Brian then detached himself from the group and walked toward a gathering news crew outside the home. "How would one of you like a REALLY big scoop?" Several of them raised their hands. "Any of you got a helicopter?"

"Holy Mother! D, what's happening?" The Captain demanded. "Unprovoked surprise attack, Captain..." D began, looking at readouts. "It's B-ko!" "B-ko!?" She quickly grabbed Mike's collar. "Banks! Find some way of speeding this thing up!" "Yes, Captain!" Mike replied, and darted off for Engineering, leaving part of his collar with the good Captain. 'Great.' he thought. 'The LAST thing I need is for B-ko to bring this thing down on Saint Louis! Graviton had enough problems with it!'

The explosions intensified. B-ko darted about above the ship, out-maneuvering its defense fields with little difficulty. The so-called "Death Ray Machines" were little more than a light show as she unloaded clip after clip of Akagiyama Missiles into the Flight Deck. Finally, The Captain called out through the PA system, "B-ko! What do you want? Why are you destroying my ship... again?!" "Send out that pissant Banks! He's the only one I want!" B-ko shouted back, and blew up a few more Death Rays. "Okay! Okay! Just stop it!"

She ticked off the PA and signaled to D. "Inform mister Banks that we have to, regrettably, dissolve our partnership."

D only nodded, and set off for Engineering. Mike was still very unaware of his fate, and was working to build up the Graviton burst more quickly. "Let's see... cut some power from other decks..." he began to mutter to himself. "I can do this... I just need to find some more power..."

Back on the Bridge, The Captain had downed enough gin to forget the order she'd given D not five minutes ago, and called down to Engineering. "Mister Banks... What's our status?" "It's the generators... we simply don't have enough power to go around. At this rate we've got another half-hour before we reach Crossing Mass*."

[[*Note: Crossing Mass is a nifty term invented by the author to denote how many gravitons per cubic inch are necessary to Cross. While *exact* Crossing Mass varies from object to object (a human's Mass is obviously far less than the Starship's), here's it's about 10 trillion particles per cubic inch. That's not abnormally high, because gravitons themselves are about the same size as electrons. Anyway...]]

"A half hour? Well that won't do! Mikey, give me that power!" "I CAN'T DO IT, Captain! The engines won't take it! They can't take any more!" "Don't give me lip, mister! Give me power! Bridge out."

While Mike could do little more than marvel at the dialogue that had just taken place, he moved to comply. "Where else can I get power?" he asked himself, looking over the alien panels. He still wasn't too familiar with the Alpha Cygnan language, and it was mostly just guesswork, but he still did his best to divert more power to the generators.

That is, before the hulking form of D appeared...

The news chopper neared the now smoking Starship, carrying A-ko, C-ko and Brian. Theirs was now a two-pronged mission: stop B-ko from destroying the Starship long enough to Cross it, and save Mike... from B-ko.

She wasn't rising in A-ko's favor, THAT much was sure.

"A-ko, you hold off B-ko while C-ko and I find Mike." Brian said, assuming the same commanding presence as his cousin. A-ko nodded. The Cygnans had no reason to harm C-ko, and if she did manage to get captured, A-ko could rescue her once they Crossed. Things weren't so easily repaired in this dimension, so if the Starship crashed here...

She preferred not to think about it. C-ko was bubbling slightly... both from excitement and being a little bit scared. She also threw the occasional glance at Brian... he was as strong as Mike was, and someone she could talk to. Also, whenever he looked at her... she just got this odd little feeling in her stomach...

Is this what A-ko had talked about? 'NO! Not him!' she thought. 'He's a butthead! He's rude! He's mean! He's--'

Brian looked her way again, and most rational thought ceased. Yet another unexplained phenomenon, courtesy of The Crosser.

"What the--?!" The pilot of the craft exclaimed, and with good reason. A full battery of Akagiyama missiles were headed for it...

"D, please! Just a few more minutes and I swear I can get everything working!" Mike protested. "Tell B-ko that. She's inches away from destroying us." D returned, and pushed him into another elevator. The disk lit up beneath them and took off for the Flight Deck, racing by the levels in a matter of seconds. Soon enough, they had arrived at their destination... but B-ko was not there waiting.

Instead, she was busy destroying a news helicopter a few feet away...

'This is Dan Grey for News Channel Five, Saint Louis. We currently have live feed coming from our chopper, which has reportedly been taken over by a group of anti-alien revolutionaries. Let's take a look at it... 'We're getting some really clear pictures of the alien spaceship... Our sources tell us it's almost four miles long... And there's something-- Oh, my, there's something floating in front of the helicopter, it MAY be one of the aliens. It's a humanoid, but with apparently blue hair. That's a pretty good sign it's not human. 'Could this be some kind of greeting? Wait... oh, my, it's firing something at them! OH, the humanity!....'

The helicopter exploded into a fiery ball of molten metal, and B-ko simply floated there, giggling. "I've FINALLY gotten rid of you, A-ko! NOW, to Banks!" she said to herself, and turned to face him. Mike simply stood there, dumbfounded. 'How can that BE?' he asked himself. 'That CAN'T happen!'

B-ko landed on the flight deck. "Step away from him, D!" she ordered. The large Spy knew what the poor fool was in for, but could do little

to stop it. She walked to the other side of the Deck and turned her back toward them, not wanting to see the end of another innocent life.

Mike stood there, now fueled with the courage of friends fallen. He stared down the barrel of her Missile launcher, "May the curse of Minmei fall on your voice, and may your body rot like Zeriam!" he yelled at her.

There was only an audible click as another round loaded into the launcher, and B-ko began to chuckle softly. "You... are... FINISHED, BANKS!" she cried out, and readied the firing mechanism.

That was when about three and a quarter tons fell on her head.

Mike blinked savagely for a second, then saw what he couldn't seem to sort out. Brian, A-ko, and C-ko were all sitting on a motorcycle, with one of his Portable Crossers attached to the sidecar.

"Hey, cuz!" Brian yelled out. "Miss me?" Mike only grinned. "DAMN happy to see ya', boy!"

He ran over to him and hugged him. B-ko emitted a slight groan from below the motorcycle, but everyone ignored it. "How'd you do that, Brian? What's the story with the bike?" "Well, I was thinking we could use this bike to ride around the halls once we got here. The Crosser was originally to get us out of here in an emergency, we just had to use it sooner than I thought!" "But, where'd the bike come from?" "Oh, I looked in the Crosser back at your house. Apparently Kei had left it somewhere, and I thought we could use it." A-ko responded with a devilish grin. "Oh, you redhead, you!" Mike hugged A-ko now. C-ko looked at them all excitedly, "So, now what?" "Well, we get the Starship up to Crossing Mass. The problem is, we don't have much power, so it might take awhile." "I know what we can do!" Brian exclaimed. "Let's hook this extra Crosser up to the first one! It'll cut our time in half!" "Brilliant, little cuz! Let's get to work!"

Mike jumped onto the motorcycle and they drove off into the corridors of the Starship, leaving a more than slightly pained B-ko behind.

Several minutes later, Mike snapped the last of the power conduits into place. The Captain had downed another bottle of Cygnan Wine since she'd sentenced him to execution, so she scarcely noticed his actions. D DID notice his actions, but chose to ignore him... for some odd reason, she liked him. He had guts... something that not many males had in this day and age.

So she watched silently as the small device hummed to life. The others all looked excited, and D was ready to let a smile slip, when she heard an aggravated breathing behind her.

"Leave ME to die on the deck, will they?!" B-ko screamed from behind her, and with the aid of her damaged (but not inoperable) Akagiyama-23, she knocked D to the side and took aim at the others. "You've humiliated me for the LAST TIME, A-KO!!"

A-ko took the usual defensive stance, when suddenly, the entire ship began to lurch. "Alright! We're Crossing!" Mike exclaimed, and ran to

the nearest portal. Sure enough, the Starship was being pulled into a large wormhole nearby; the blues and yellows of energy mixing with the fabric of time and space cast an eerie glow into the cabin, and Mike could not help but be awed. "That won't stop me! Let's finish this!" B-ko screamed, undaunted, and fired the expected barrage of Akagiyama Missiles at A-ko.

A-ko sprang to the rafters of the large Engineering Room, and the missiles flew past the others into a large bank of controls, destroying them instantly. The computer began to blare warnings, and a sterile voice began droning: 'ANTI-GRAV SYSTEM AT 35%. GRAVITATION UNSTABLE. ALL HANDS ABANDON SHIP.'

Naturally, no one on-board liked this.

The people in Graviton City liked it even less.

(XIV. "It's another BEAUTIFUL day in Graviton City...")

The sun was shining over Graviton City, as it usually did. The Gravitonians felt no shame in the fact that they only seemed to have rain when it was convenient for everyone involved, mainly because they had had to deal with so many other things in the past three years. These things ranged from alien invasion to having to increase taxes to pay for High School Reconstruction; and even with all of that, they STILL managed to have a good time. Other cities had a right to be jealous.

And when it DID rain in Graviton, it rarely rained water. It normally rained debris.

Today was no exception. At first, the winds had begun to pick up, many thinking it just a large breeze blowing in from the East China Sea. But the winds kept growing in intensity... Miss Ayumi, sitting on her balcony, was disturbed from her nap by a "Mods Burger" wrapper flying into her face.

"My goodness!" she said, sitting up, "The weather certainly changes fast around here..."

Then, the sky was suddenly torn apart by flashes of lightning and claps of thunder, seemingly louder than sound could get. The sky grew dark, and a flash of bright yellow light lit up the crater, forcing the teacher to avert her eyes. "Oh, my! Was there a festival I wasn't told about?"

As soon as the flash had come it had gone, and in its place was the Alpha Cygnan Starship... but it didn't remain there for long. Ayumi could only gasp as she saw the massive craft plummet from the sky back into Graviton Bay.

"Well, there goes my new apartment near the waterfront!" she exclaimed.

'Good morning! This is Ogi Ippei with the 'Morning Delight' show! It's another BEAUTIFUL day in Graviton City, so all of you kids may want to take the last bit of the weekend to go for a swim in the

lake, or maybe take a visit to the Seaside Building, because it's--

'Wait a moment... *ahem* This just in! A large explosion has been detected near Graviton Bay. It seems that the alien Starship-- which has been missing for a day and a half, now-- has returned, and is now crashing BACK into the bay!

'Hmm... Perhaps you should skip the swim in the bay, kids...'

The Red Alert sirens blared their incessant warnings to the already well alerted crew, and the lights cast a dangerous glow of Hades the Starship's interior. C-ko clung to A-ko with as much force as she could muster, and the Brian was ready to join her. "T-t-this is b-bad, r-right?" he said above the din. "Yes, Brian. Yes it is." Mike responded with a defeated look on his face. "What are we doing just standing here?" A-ko yelled. "We have to get off this ship! Let's go!"

In a flash, A-ko took up Brian and Mike (C-ko already affixed to her) and ran off down the corridor. B-ko, not wanting to be outdone, fired up her injured JetPack and flew after her. "You're not getting away THAT easily, A-ko!" she yelled, barely missing a falling beam.

More and more debris rained from the ceiling, and on the Bridge, The Captain was once again panicking. "NO! Not again! My BEAUTIFUL SHIIIIIP!!!" she exclaimed, an explosion throwing her to the deck. Not a foot away from her, her last bottle of genuine Cygnan Red Wine crashed and shattered, and she simply stared at the glass shards as they bled what had become her lifeblood onto the cold metal plating. A tear came to her eye, and she realized that, once again, she had been beaten.

By two teenage girls.

Letting out a cry normally reserved for the eternally damned, she felt the ship plummet faster... and faster...

A-ko ran through the quickly collapsing hallways of the Starship, frantically looking for an opening. 'There has to be an airlock SOMEWHERE!' she thought to herself, dodging a falling conduit. 'Wait a minute! I can MAKE one!'

She quickly stopped, giving all of her "passengers" a quick taste of whiplash, removed them, and squared her shoulders at a hullplate. Summoning all of her strength, A-ko threw herself at the hull, placing a large dent in it. But no break. She took a few steps back and threw herself at it again. She could hear bolts strain, but no success.

Finally, she made a flying kick at the plate, and with a loud BANG-CRASH, it fell loose-- taking HER with it! The others all emitted gasps of worry and surprise, and C-ko ran to the new hole torn in the deck. "A-KO!!" she shouted, her big green eyes doubling in size (which was a feat, considering the size her eyes normally were).

A-ko looked around frantically for something to grab onto, but she was falling away from the ship, and thus any chance to grab onto anything. The redhead's fabled locks flew about her face as she

scrambled for an idea... Then, with a resounding THUMP, she landed on something solid. "Wow! Deja vu!" she thought aloud, then looked down to see what she was straddling.

Not a cockpit... but the familiar dome of an Alpha Cygnan transport!

"Don't worry, Miss Magami! We have you!" boomed the resounding voice of D from above the din. "D! Do you have the Captain?" A-ko shouted back. "Yes... and she's not in good shape." "At least she's alive! What about the others?!"

So the transport hovered there for a few seconds, shortly before the Starship began to break up...

Mike pulled C-ko out of the opening, shortly before it collapsed shut. Things were looking bad, for sure. Brian dodged a beam and sat down, looking confused and shocked. "So this is it." he began. "We're going to die." "We are NOT going to die!" Mike said, but C-ko started to cry anyway. "AHHHH!!! I'M TOO YOUNG TO DIE!! WAHHHH!!!" she yelled. "C-ko, please! We have to get out of here!" Mike yelled back, but he was very close to joining her.

An explosion sounded from another end of the Ship, and a loud series of creaks and groans arose from the ceiling above them. "The above deck's collapsing! We've gotta move!" Mike yelled. "Too late!!" Brian screamed, and covered his head as several tons of metal was doomed to fall on them...

THUNK!!!!.... Nothing happened.

"What the...?"

Brian lifted his head up, and saw none other than B-ko Daitokuji standing there, in her damaged Power Suit, straining to support the deckplating. "GO!" she yelled. "There's a transport outside!"

She indicated a new opening she'd made behind her, and the Cygnan transport was indeed waiting. Brian and C-ko ran out of the opening with no hesitation; C-ko leaping into A-ko's awaiting arms and Brian collapsing next to the already collapsed Captain. Mike, however, stood there, looking at B-ko, who exchanged the look.

"What of your revenge?" he asked. "One of us..." she began, her power suit sparking. "Needs to keep them in check... Take care of C-ko, and kick A-ko's butt for me every once and awhile..."

Her suit began to spark more. "No, B-ko! You can jump out after me!" "There'll be no power left... GO!"

B-ko then gave him a swift kick, and he flew into the transport. Then, with a resounding BOOM, her Akagiyama-24 Power Suit gave in, the deckplating falling atop her...

"B... B-ko..." A-ko muttered, seeing it all happening. She could barely speak... "Miss A-ko!" D yelled. "We're all finally rid of her! Your nemesis is gone!"

But A-ko's mind couldn't help but reel with all of the experiences the two of them had shared in the past two years... All the fights,

all of the quests, all of the "uneasy alliances"...

A-ko then realized... she'd not lost an enemy... but a true friend....

----- (XV. True Friends, True Rivals)

The transport somberly landed at Graviton Seaport, everyone amazed at the feeling of loss that A-ko was experiencing. For the past two years, all B-ko had wanted was her death... and yet, every time it was necessary, they had joined together to save C-ko.

A-ko understood it the least of all.

"A-ko... don't feel sad." C-ko said, not wanting to see her best friend unhappy. "I'm sure B-ko's in a much better place." "Don't put your money on it." The Captain muttered, then passed out again.

A-ko could do little more than stare out over the waters, and marvel at life. How fragile it was... And yet, she was re-invested to live it at its fullest.

[AUTHOR'S NOTE: That's ONE way it could've ended. Wanna know how it REALLY ended? Read on...]

"Well... at least now... I can keep my money..." The Captain said.

Just as she finished that statement, however, the soft purring of an engine came to a stop behind her. A car door opened, "Is there a Captain Napolipolita here?" "Yes..." The Captain said slowly, knowing that whatever it was couldn't be good. "Captain, I'm from the Federal Collection Committee. I'm afraid we have the matter of a few years of back taxes to settle." "Taxes?! I'm not even a citizen of this country!" "Ah, you weren't until today! The Council of the City-State of Graviton officially passed the 'Cygnan Citizenship Act' today. That means that you and your crew are all now official citizens of Graviton City. While that means you are now eligible for federal health care, unemployment, and other benefits... you now also owe us back-taxes." "I see... and how much is that, exactly?"

The accountant whipped out a calculator and did some quick math. "Let's see... you have business tax, property tax, income tax, import tax, export tax... THIS should just about cover it..." he said, showing her the number...

And the cry could be heard for miles around as they drove away with possession of the Alpha Cygnan's holdings.

The Captain collapsed to her knees, no longer caring whether or not her crew saw her cry. Everything she knew, everything she had fought to keep and run... her Ship... her crew... everything of hers was gone.

The only thing that was positive about it was the loss of B-ko. Hikaru would be sad, sure, but they could finally start that life together, without her interference. So the Captain lifted her head to the smoking remains of the Starship...

And began to wail...

The waters of Graviton Bay began to part, and a blue streak shot across to the pier. "It's coming right at us!" Mike exclaimed, and pushed everyone into the water. The object did, indeed, plow straight through the docks into the shoreline, sending wood and dirt everywhere. Mike and the others bobbed in the water, puzzling at what had just happened, having to duck and occasional plank of wood.

"What WAS that? Part of the ship?" Brian asked. "I don't think so..." Mike said.

Slowly, inexorably, a pile of matter arose from the crater created by the impact. Dirt soaked and bleeding, the unmistakable form simply raised an arm to A-ko...

"Gotchya..." it said, then collapsed to the ground.

The group clamored out of the water and surrounded it, Mike wiping away the dirt. "My God... I can't believe it!" "What is it?" The Captain said, not wanting to hear the only probable answer. "It's... it's B-ko! She survived!" The Captain broke down in tears again. "And Hicky and I could've been SOO happy!!" she said, sobbing. "How'd she get out? How COULD she get out?" A-ko asked. "Well, her jetpack is red hot. She must've used her last bit of energy to fire it up... that means she doesn't have long at this rate! We have to get her to a hospital, stat!" Mike said, picking B-ko up. "Right. I can't believe I'm doing this, BUT..."

A-ko then picked Mike up (not bothering to just take B-ko from him) and ran at near the speed of sound to the nearest hospital. [[Begin special "Graviton City Edition" section.]]Sitting at a bus stop that happened to be in her path...

"I'm not saying you don't have a chance, Neil," said a brown-haired young man. "It's just highly unlikely." he finished, turning a page of the 'Graviton Gazette'. "And you think YOU can do better, mate?" returned the Australian. "Is Art 'the great fanfic writer' Damon not willing to take a chance?"

Art shot a glance over at Neil. "Very well. You have a bet." he said, and walked out into the middle of the road. 'She's due by any second...' he thought, running a comb through his hair. "You don't have a chance! Admit it! She'd obviously like an older gentleman with more refined tastes..." Neil said, sitting back on the bench. "Just remember, YOU said that, not me." the teenager returned. "Very cute. She won't even stop for you, you know it."

Art turned to him. "How are you so damn sure?" he asked, then heard the sudden WHOOSH of an approaching object. "Shit--" was all he managed again before he was flung several feet into the air by A-ko's impact. "EXCUSE MEEEEEEE!!" she yelled, carrying Mike, carrying B-ko, to the hospital.

Neil only chuckled. "Told 'im." he said, then picked up the copy of the 'Gazette'... shortly before Art landed on him. "You... would've... done... no... better..." Art managed, and passed out. "The sad thing is..." Neil muttered, pushing the comatose teen off of

him, "*I* wanted to go first..."

[[End special "Graviton City Edition" section.]]

C-ko turned and looked at the crying Captain. "Why so sad, Captain?" she asked, her own green eyes now bulging. "My ship... my life... all for that damn girl!" she exclaimed, weeping on D's shoulder (well, elbow, at any rate). "Aww.. well... *sniff* I'm sorry... *sniff*..." C-ko said, the telltale signs approaching. "Princess, please!" D tried, but she was too late. C-ko erupted into a fountain of tears, and D was faced with her two superiors crying on her lap...

About twelve hours later, Mike was sitting by the side of B-ko's bed, simply looking at the wounded millionairess. A-ko sat on the opposite side of the bed, also looking at her intently. The doctors had been able to stabilize her and mend her broken bones quite easily, but the internal bleeding was something different. As far as they knew, they had fixed everything... it was only a matter of time before B-ko awoke.

They hoped.

"A-ko..." Mike began. "Hm?" she responded, looking up. "Were you really afraid for B-ko's life?" She was several moments in responding. "I suppose I was... I had no idea how much she meant to me... When she's gone... I have no rival. Nothing to keep life interesting. I suppose it'd be nice, knowing that C-ko was safe and Graviton's taxes could go down again... but..." "'But'. There's always a 'but'. Are you sure you don't feel... anything else?"

A-ko took a moment to look at B-ko, then looked back at Mike. "I'm not sure... why do you ask?" "Oh, nothing... just a bet with someone back home..." A-ko sighed, and concentrated on B-ko's face again. "I wish I knew... I wish I knew..."

Mike sighed as well. "Fine. If you'll excuse me..." he said, and walked into the hallway. "Must have AB blood..." A-ko muttered, and looked... REALLY LOOKED at B-ko. 'What the hell have we been doing? And over what? Over C-ko? Over honor? Over the Cygnans? WHAT?' she thought, trying desperately to sort everything out. 'Or is Mike right? Have we been fighting because...'

A-ko then felt a sudden compulsion... a true test. Nervously she stood and bit her lip, looking down at B-ko. 'Well... one certain way to find out...' A-ko began to lean forward, her shadow falling over the resting form of B-ko... and in one flash, she decided to try it... A-ko leaned forward, closing her eyes...

And planted a soft kiss on B-ko's forehead.

A-ko quickly withdrew, looking down at B-ko. She held her breath, still fairly unsure of what she was doing. All the years of fighting... three painful years... She wouldn't have kept doing it if didn't mean anything, right? This all HAD to have a purpose, right? She continued to look at her...

When suddenly, B-ko's eyelids began to flicker. A-ko took a sharp breath and leaned in toward her again, listening for anything. "B-ko? Are you okay? Can you hear me?"

The young mistress' eyes slowly parted, her eyelids carrying what looked and felt like the weight of the world. Slowly, her green eyes focused, something which, apparently, B-ko did NOT take joy in doing. Her mind was full of white noise and pain, and of all things, the first thing she saw on waking was--

A-ko.

She smiled. "B-ko! Thank God you're okay! Can you talk to me?" the redhead said, smiling wildly, and even, amazingly, wiping a tear from her eye. "Get... away..." B-ko growled, just below A-ko's hearing. "What was that? Please, speak up..." "Get... AWAY!!!"

B-ko raised her hand and, with more force than a wounded person had ever used before, she brought it down with a massive SLAP onto A-ko's face!

A-ko took a few steps back, recoiling from the impact. "What the--" "Never... ever... EVER GET THAT CLOSE TO ME AGAIN!! DO YOU HEAR ME?!" B-ko screamed, and started throwing whatever she could at A-ko. The heroine ducked various medical devices, and thought to herself, 'Nope... I was wrong. I DO hate her.'

Mike, on the other hand, only stood in the doorway and smiled.

----- (Epilogue-- "Tell me is it REALLY real?")

With a wild flash and a clap of thunder, Mike and Brian erupted back into their home dimension, a sea of electrons filling the room. The younger matted down his now static-filled hair, the older only sighed and spun thoughts of the weekend just past.

"So what happens now, Mike?" Brian asked, anxiously looking at his older cousin. "NOW, you get ready to go home. Your parents will be here, soon, and I need to get some construction workers here before my parents arrive..." "What do you mean? It's just OVER?" "Far from it. A-ko, B-ko, and C-ko will live on. We got there sometime between movies three and four, so they obviously go on to make 'Final'." "But what about all of the things we did? All of the adventure, all of the *romance*..." Brian said, nudging him. "Doesn't matter. We can go back and watch the tape, if you like. But I'm next to positive we've changed nothing..."

And so the two did watch "Final" that night. Nothing at all had seemed to change. Brian was puzzled, but Mike could only think that he had lost ANOTHER chance to get A-ko. But then--

"Wait! Stop the tape!" "What?" "Pause it... rewind... THERE!"

Mike pointed it to Brian, who couldn't quite believe it. There was an ever-so-small scar on B-ko's leg... one that looked like it had come from hot metal...

The two exchanged a look, and Mike wandered back off to the Crosser, singing "Follow Your Dream"...

NOT THE END....

End
file.